OUR SOCIAL CHAT

All letters intended for this department should be addressed to "Aunt Jennie," care of The Progressive Farmer, Raleigh, N. C.

Aunt Jennie's Letter.

Did you see the article about farmer boys in last week's paper? Do you think those boys waited for opportunities or made them?

No matter what your ambition in life is you can make a beginning toward its relization right where you are. Never let yourself think that your failures are due to your surroundings. The right kind of purpose begins anywhere. Think of Lincoln and what he became; surely there are few bovs with fewer advantages than he had. Our business in life is not to get through our jobs first, but to do thoroughly well that which we undertake to do. It is work well done that brings success. Life is more than mere competition of man with man. Success is not attained by half-hearted effort. Appearances are deceptive, and what seem to succeed to-day may prove a soap bubble to-morrow, leaving only a soiled spot where it fell. That reminds me of the story of the country boy who, becoming disgusted with farm life, determined to seek his fortune in the city. Finding no work save in a saloon, he engaged himself there, but meanwhile he sent no message to the home folks. He was ashamed of his job, and left it as soon as he could obtain another position. Had he waited for the other position to seek him instead of bestirring himself to find it, doubtless he would have remained in the saloon.

Our letters are inetresting this week. I think of many of you often, and wonder where you can be that you fail to remember us.

AUNT JENNIE.

Negro Life and Character During and After Slavery.

VI.

Dear Aunt Jennie:—I will unlock memory's store-house and give a few reminiscences of "ante-bellum" days and some observations of "negro life and character" during the days of slavery and since emancipation; will state the unvarnished facts.

It was my lot to have been born and reared among the Southern slaves. My father owned between fifty and sixty, and my first husband over one hundred. I lived then in Alabama, and in the Cotton Belt. The plantations were large, and nearly all averaged over one hundred slaves. Of course where there were so many, there must of necessity have been strict discipline. Each plantation boasted of a commodious dwelling and often handsome grounds. The negro quarters were not very far from the mansion. They consisted of a long street with rows of small cottages on each side. At the end of this street was the overseer's house; near the other ternimus was the "nursery." At the rear of each cottage has a small patch or garden for vegetables. They were allowed to have chickens, and some were allowed to raise a few hogs. Every plantation had an overseer and a colored "driver."

The overseer was paid a good salary, ranging from one thousand to fifteen hundred dollars a year. It was his duty to see that the slaves worked and were orderly, and to punish those that were not. Also to issue the weekly rations or allowance, which consisted of four or five pounds of meat, one peck of meal and some molasses. They could not indulge in luxuries, but their fare was plain and substantial.

This colored "driver," a slave, always went with the largest gang of "field hands." He carried a "whip," and stood amid the hands (he was not required to work), and they all seemed to fear him as much as the overseer. There was also a responsible negro woman that went with what was termed the "trash gang," composed of children large enough to work. The- was another important personage on the place, known as the "spy." His vocation was to attend to the stock, and he was allowed the privilege of riding an old mule. He was also confidental adviser of the master and his agent; in other words, he watched around to see who was committing any depredations, as stealing or violating any of the rules of the plantation, and reported to the lord of the manor or his agent. Therefore he was hated by the other negroes and called the "spy."

I spoke of the nursery; at one end of the street in the quarters, there was a larger house to keep the small children during the day; two old women took care of and cooked for them; their mothers would take them there every morning, and when they required her attention, would have to come from the field so many times a day; at night would take them home.

Some owners were kind and humane. As a rule the slaves were cared for when sick, were well clad, and with all the strict discipline, they were happy.

At night there was a melody of sounds. At some of the cabins you would hear the banjo or fiddle and dancing, and just across the way would be a prayer-meeting going on, with preaching and singing.

There were two festive days they never forgot—the Fourth of July and Christmas. Old "Comer" (the grand "Mogul" of the plantation), would invariably remark to his master: "Well, Massy, we'se got a good crap and 'specks a good dinner dis Fourth." It was the custom to give them a grand "lay out" when the crops were "laid by," which down South was by the Fourth of July. A long table was spread with snowy white cloths and loaded with good things. The white family, with often some visiting friends, would repair to the "quarter" and eat their dinner, after which the grown negroes were summoned, and nearly all found standing room around the long table that extended near the end of the street. It was a scene to be remembered. Their keen appetites were soon satisfied, if you would judge from their smiling faces and the rapid flight of barbecued pigs, mutton and beef, chicken pie, ginger cakes, and pies galore. After that table had been cleared away and replenished, the children marched up, all dressed in their Sunday best. The "jug" was finally passed around to the older negroes, and you should have heard their toasts.

But the favored negroes were the house servants; they were well trained, had light service, and fared sumptuously every day. Each servant had his or her appointed duties— one to cook, one to wash and iron, two house maids and seamstresses, a dining room boy and a carriage driver, the gardener and the "old black mammy" or nurse, to whom the children were much attached.

The mistress of the house found her duties arduous too. She had to see that each servant was properly trained, and at his or her post. I heard a Northern lady, who was visiting a Southern family, remark that "the mistress of the establishment was the greatest slave of all."

Just before the Civil War, a planter in our county bought a few negroes in Mobile, Ala., that came directly from Africa. Among them was an African princess, and one they called "old Jack." Neither of those could ever be induced to work. They were obstinate and defiant. Sometimes the overseer would get Jack to the field to hoe, but as soon as he would see any grass-hoppers, would drop the hoe and catch them and eat them. He refused to wear clothes as other negroes did. They could not speak a word of English, nor could they understand their language. I think the man that purchased them was heartily sick of his bargain.

A few negroes could read and write a little. We had one, a blacksmith, and above the average in intelligence, who made his pen and ink, wrote his passes, and managed to get from county, State to State, until finally he was suspected and taken up in Virginia and returned to us in Alabama. He admitted that he made his writing material and wrote the passes, and his aim was to get north. He was not punished for the act, but was sent to work at his usual occupation.

Some unruly ones would run away and remain in the woods until hunted and brought in with blood hounds. Some owners would send the runaway word if he would come in and go to work he would not be molested.

Not many marriages were celebrated by any ceremony, the men only asking for his wife. I remember witnessing one couple married by a minister of the gospel; the woman was a favorite servant at the dear old Greensboro Female College, at Greensboro. We dressed her as a bride, drew from our trunks our jewelry (which we were not allowed to wear there), and adorned her with it.

One of the great wrongs of slavery was the separation of families by sale. I have in mind a case now. A wealthy family owned a bright mulatto man; a very capable servant, employed as chief cook, whose wife and children belonged to a neighbor on the adjoining plantation. That neighbor moved to another State, but before leaving, he offered to buy the husband, or sell the wife and children; but they refused to sell at any price or to buy, so there was a separation. As a general rule the negroes intermarried on the same plantation on which they lived, and the planters endeavored to have them do so. They had to have a "pass" to go from place to place.

As a race, they are very susceptible to religious impressions, loved to "go ot meeting" and sing and shout; had weekly prayer-meetings in their quarters. I believe some of them were true Christians. There was melody in their songs. I attended a great Southern camp-meeting, and when the whites retired from the tent, where services were conducted, the negroes would go in and sing and pray until a late hour.

They were superstitious as well as religious, believed in conjuration, ghosts and hobgoblins. One old negro on our place was always trying to conjure the overseer; would put bottles of some vile stuff under the gate that he frequently passed through.

But we should give the negroes credit for their fidelity and faithfulness during the war. I don't think history has ever recorded anything to equal it. The awful crimes they commit now, were unheard of when the manhood of the South was at the front, and their families left in the care of their slaves.

After emancipation, they were quiet and orderly in the rural districts. In the towns and cities some would presumme on their freedom and be very insulting. The old negroes have ever been more polite and courteous than the younger ones. They have grown weary waiting for the promised "forty acres of land and a mule." These negro agitators and "carpet-baggers have caused, to some extent, this feeling of unrest among them. Some are acquiring some property and own a home. Some of them are reliable, and pay their debts, but as a rule the most of them love to get in debt and give a mortgage, and eventually leave the farm and migrate to the towns.

Immorality is apparently increasing. I think their relations to the white race are less cordial; this doubtless is caused by platform speakers and negro agitators who have filled their minds with unwholesome idears of social and political equality.

They do not spend their money judiciously; are fond of using gay and gaudy "finery." If there is an excursion, they will spend their last dollar to buy a ticket to go on that "'scursion."

And I must conclude in the language of another: The race still has "a grievous amount of ignorance, a sad amount of viciousness and a tremenduous amount of laziness and thriftlessness." REBCCA.

Onslow Co., N. C.